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Students' Views on Prevention of Coursework Plagiarism

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Abstract. This study investigated the reasons as to why students plagiarize in conducting their coursework assignments. I used questionnaires to gather students' views on coursework malpractices and ways of preventing these malpractices. I collected quantitative and qualitative data from 83 undergraduate students of computing in two Ugandan universities. Laziness, desire to pass with high grades, inferiority complex, and unrealistic coursework timeframes were cited for plagiarism in doing coursework assignments. Recommendations for preventing plagiarism are drawn out of these findings. Thereafter, a framework for administering coursework is developed.

Keywords: Academic dishonesty; Higher education evaluation; Research

1 Introduction

Academic dishonesty characterized by practice of plagiarism by students and lecturers or professors in universities and other higher educational institutions has become an important area of research. Universities cannot claim quality in academic systems when coursework cheating and plagiarism is not effectively addressed by course facilitators. The Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE) defines plagiarism as the reuse of someone else's ideas, processes, results, or words without explicitly acknowledging that person (Okyay et al., 2008). Plagiarism is an unacceptable practice that renounces academic integrity and threatens academic systems. According to Kennedy (2006), plagiarism is the illegal practice of taking someone else's ideas, data, findings, language, illustrative materials, images, or writing, and presenting them as if they were your own. To avoid plagiarism reference the source and put quotation marks around all the quoted words, or paraphrase and reference. The above definitions have limitations because they fail to cover the cases for ghost authorship, accidental plagiarism and self-plagiarism (McCuen, 2008).

Uganda Christian University (UCU) established “rule of life” to govern its activities. One of the statements in the above set of rules is that “we shall tell the truth and renounce all forms of plagiarism and false testimony” (UCU, 2006).

In a survey of 93 UK higher educational institutions, a total of 9,229 plagiarism cases were recorded in one year, and 143 students were expelled. Wider variations were discovered in the rates of plagiarism from one institution to another. Even though many students view plagiarism as unethical, under stressful conditions, they may still choose to plagiarize (McCuen, 2008). Hale (1987) reported that more than 50% of 300 undergraduates plagiarized papers even though they knew that plagiarism was wrong. From findings of research students thought their lecturers were reluctant to investigate plagiarism and that those who cheated were rarely caught. The 12 lecturers who were interviewed for the study were divided on whether they would investigate cheating. The lecturers who were not supporting investigations on cheating gave reasons ranging from the time it takes to go through university processes, their sympathy for students, and the burden of proof. The evidence puts the lecturers in the firing line because students can seek legal redress if they think the evidence is insufficient. Collberg and Kobourov (2005) acknowledged the misconduct in the academic community. They mentioned practices that included students submitting assignments copied from their friends, and researchers publishing the work of others as their own. In this research I investigated coursework copying by undergraduate students in two Ugandan universities to formulate guidelines that course facilitators may use to administer coursework in Universities.

1.1 Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were to: 1) investigate the reasons as to why students plagiarize coursework assignments; 2) elicit suggestions that students give to their facilitators for minimizing plagiarism; and 3) develop a framework for administering coursework while minimizing plagiarism.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The theory for study of plagiarism practices by students in Ugandan universities is adopted from McDonald and Carroll (2006) based on holistic institutional approaches needed to address academic integrity. The two scholars stated that looking to the underlying causes of plagiarism rather than its symptoms is perhaps the key to ensuring that a holistic approach to plagiarism with emphasis on promoting good scholarly practices rather than focusing on punishing plagiarism is adopted.

Stearns (2006) emphasized the role that course instructors play in fostering an ethical academic culture. One way to accomplish this is to develop positive student-instructor relationships through interpersonal competence and immediacy, arguing that instructor classroom behaviour shapes the university environment. She further said, “The first thing is to discuss academic integrity with students, including definitions and rationales of the importance of integrity.”

2 Literature Review

2.1 Plagiarism

The word plagiarism comes from a Latin verb meaning to kidnap. It gives description of the process deliberately or unintentionally “kidnapping” which is stealing of other people’s work and intellectual property without their consent. Donald L. McCabe, founder of centre for Academic integrity at Duke University, published an article in the *New York Times* that reported 38% of undergraduate students having participated in some form of Internet plagiarism. Those students did not consider plagiarism as cheating (McCabe, 2003 & Kizza, 2009). Technology has made it easy for students to lift term papers and only change author’s names. Plagiarism is now common practice in computing science and engineering disciplines. In these disciplines technology has created a plagiarism culture that not only erodes ethics of individuals but has serious consequences in the safety and security of both hardware and software systems that run computing systems to serve mankind. Plagiarism includes, but does not only apply to, failure to indicate the source with quotation marks or footnotes where appropriate, references if any of the following are presented or reproduced in the work submitted by a student:

1. A written phrase
2. A graphic element
3. A proof
4. An idea derived from another person’s published or unpublished work (Kizza, 2009).

2.2 Types of Plagiarism

McCuen (2008) stated the following types of plagiarism:

1. Self-Plagiarism. Self-Plagiarism and dual publishing are considered fraudulent. A person who publishes similar papers with similar titles, passages and words may be guilty of fraud.

2. Ghost Authorship. Here is a situation where someone's name is included among the publishers of a scholarly article when the person did not contribute anything in preparing the article.
3. Dual publishing. This is a situation where an author publishes more than one similar paper at the same time, and this is a case of self-plagiarism. Specter (1989) reported a case in which out of 1000 authors 228 authors had published 938 articles of similar titles in different journals.
4. Collberg and Kobourov (2005) said that there was little agreement among academics as to what should be regarded as self-plagiarism and what accepted republication was. They introduced the following terms:
5. Textual reuse which is the act of incorporating text/images/ or other material from a past publication in refereed conferences and journals where copyright is assigned to someone other than the author.
6. Semantic reuse incorporates ideas from previously published work
7. Blatant reuse incorporates texts or ideas from previously published work in such a way that the two works are virtually indistinguishable.
8. Incidental reuse incorporates texts or ideas not directly related to the new ideas presented in the paper
9. Advocacy reuse incorporates texts or ideas from previously published work when writing to a community different from that in which the original work was published.

When the above practices pertain to one's own work we refer to it as textual reuse, however, when the actions are not ethical we replace reuse by plagiarism (Collberg and Kobourov (2005)

2.3 Plagiarism by Students

According to Hua-Li Jian et al (2008), well-designed coursework stimulates students' learning. Lecturers have to carefully adjust coursework difficulty level. Students need challenges of sufficient difficulty in order to foster academic development. Coursework perceived by students to be too difficult is likely to make them pursue undesirable strategies for reaching their goals.

2.4 Students' Guidelines to avoiding Plagiarism

Jordan (2006) gave the following guidelines that can help a student to avoid plagiarism:

1. Not to collaborate or do group work in a course when the course instructor does not allow that practice.
2. To list group members in case an assignment is for group work so that all the partners get credit for the work done.

3. Never to copy and paste when writing. For the case of easy writing, one should use his/her own words by first reflecting on the content read then writing the appropriate points from the content and giving the reference.
4. Do not give out the assignments you have completed. Giving your assignment to your friends adds no academic value to them but instead causes academic death.
5. Lack of time should not be used as an excuse to copy another student's work. When a student is behind time, the best is to negotiate more time with the professor who gave the assignment or just to submit it as it is.
6. Never resubmit work which had been previously submitted. You cannot resubmit a piece of work you had submitted in another class as this is practice of self-plagiarism.
7. When you have doubts about the course you are doing or if you need clarifications from lectures, ask your professor directly

2.5 Fabrication

Fabrication is the practice of using forged data to get an expected outcome or report. Research community would naturally reject fabricated and falsified data. Studies have revealed that fabrication and falsification are widespread practices throughout all sectors including academia.

2.6 Academic Cheating

Kizza (2009) defines academic cheating as presenting someone's work as your own. It is manifested in many forms including sharing another person's work, purchasing end of semester question paper or test questions in advance, and paying somebody to do an academic work for you. Among college students, cheating is common practice.

McCabe (2003) affirmed that 87% of students surveyed in 1993 admitted to cheating on written work, 70% cheated on a test at least once, 49% collaborated with others on an assignment, 52% copied from someone and 26% plagiarized (McCabe, 2003 and Kizza, 2009). According to Kizza (2009) cheating by students includes but is not limited to the following:

1. Plagiarism
2. Submission of academic work (papers, assignments, exams) that is not owned by student.
3. Submission of falsified data.
4. Accessing an examination without authority.
5. Use of unauthorized materials such as textbooks, notes or computer programs in the preparation of an assignment or during an examination.
6. Unauthorized collaboration in the preparation of an assignment.

7. Submitting the same work for credit in two courses without the permission of the course instructor.

2.7 Examination Malpractices

According to Olatoye (2002), many reasons exist for examination malpractice including: inadequate funding of schools, laxity in prosecuting offenders, inability of students to cope with school work, candidates inadequate preparations and desire to pass at all costs, poor sitting arrangement, too much emphasis on paper qualification and non completion of syllabuses, inadequate funding of school, corruption in society, and poor remuneration of teachers and examination officials.

3 Research Methodology

The cross-sectional research design was used to generate data. This is because with such a design it is easy to collect data in a short period of time from many respondents (Enon, 1998). It also allows generalization to be made about the characteristics, opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and practices of the entire population being studied. This method saves time and money without sacrificing efficiency, accuracy and information adequate in the research process. Administering questionnaires was the fact finding technique for this research.

The study focused on selected universities. Two universities were selected: one public university and one private university. Since this study is descriptive type of design, the questionnaire was selected as the best instrument for collecting data. I administered questionnaires to 83 undergraduate students in second and third years of studies. Open-ended questions were included to allow the respondents a chance to express and clarify their views.

I personally distributed the questionnaires to the students and this minimized the wastage of questionnaires and it saved time. The responses elicited were coded and tabulated. Descriptions were done on the basis of the frequencies and percentages tabulated. I analyzed the qualitative data by extracting themes and categories from the students' views.

4 Findings

The findings on the incidence of plagiarism in completing coursework assignments are summarized in Tables 1.

Table 1: Incidence of Coursework Plagiarism

Copying coursework	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, I copied	22	27
No, I did not copy	61	73
Yes, I witnessed fellow students copying	64	78
No, I did not notice any student copying	18	22
I believe copying is dishonest	18	30
I was able to finish the coursework in the given time	21	34
I was afraid my lecturer would detect the copied work	12	20
The institution policy on plagiarism is strict	10	16

Table1 shows that 27% of the students admitted having copied coursework from their fellow students, 73% responded that they did not copy coursework from colleagues, 78% of the students acknowledged that they witnessed fellow students copying other's coursework during the semester, 22% of the students responded that they did not witness any copying done by fellow students, 30% of the students believe that copying is dishonest, 34% acknowledge that they were able to finish coursework within the given timeframe, 20% were afraid that the lecturer would detect the copied work, and 16% feared the institution's policy on plagiarism which is strict.

The results of qualitative data analysis are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 presents reasons why coursework malpractices are common and Table 3 gives preventive measures to minimize copying. The major issues students raised for coursework malpractices include: lack of commitment to research, lack of textbooks and journal articles, difficult coursework with incomprehensible questions, too much time committed to social life and less time for coursework, doing coursework under pressure, the will to pass examination at all costs, relaxed university laws on coursework malpractices punishment, inferiority complex, loosing coursework, and copying becoming mainstream culture. The details are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Reasons cited for Involvement in Coursework Plagiarism (% , N=83)

Theme	Students' responses/views	%
Low commitment to research	Students are lazy at research work have a poor attitude towards research, are not serious with research	43
Lack of text books and journal articles	The institution may not have up-to-date text books, lack of relevant data to answer coursework questions, some lecturers do not give handouts, and student's lack personal textbooks	16
Incomprehensible coursework	Sometimes the coursework is too hard to do, and students may fail to understand the coursework questions	11
No interest in the course	Students may not be interested in a course, may not be around when the coursework is given, coursework is not taken serious by both students and course instructor, and students have no background in the course due to missing lectures	12
Students are lured into social life	Students have more interest in non-academic issues, students like leisure more than studies, and as students we spend more time doing irrelevant things like drinking, watching movies, or playing computer games, and we are always caught up with time for doing the coursework and we end up copying.	9
Students work under pressure	Many assignments at the same time, poor time management, some students balance between work, family and studies	13
Easy exam passing	Copying is a fast way of passing an exam that is difficult, to compensate for low marks in tests and get good grades	22
Copying is not punishable	No punishment for copying, coursework is not marked with strictness, punishment for copying is friendly, no punishment when you copy	7
Inferiority complex	Perceived incompetence (if a better performing student has different work, the rest of the students copy from him/her)	13
Lost work	When work is corrupted in a computer system, you have to copy in order to meet the submission deadline.	3
Copying is tradition	Copying becomes habit, copy because others copy, some students start copying from secondary school and the practice continues to University	21
Poor teaching methods	Some lecturers give coursework to students without giving the class proper foundation lectures in the course, students don't understand some lecturers, don't understand some topics, poor teaching methods by some lecturers, lectures missing lectures, lecturer giving coursework given to recent classes	18
Low interest in education	Many who graduate are unemployed	2
Poor timing of coursework assignments	Coursework given close to final examination time is not done properly as students are preparing for finals, students may not be aware of the coursework submission date, and time allocated for coursework research is not enough	22
Supervisor cooperation	Research supervisors don't cooperate with their students, and students repeat same chapters many time, they resort to copying to cut on printing costs	9

The suggestions the students advanced for combating plagiarism are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Students' Suggestions for Addressing Coursework Malpractices (N=83)

Theme	Students' views	%
Standard coursework	Do not give questions that are so hard and for which students' do not have access to reference materials, do not give the same questions you gave to your students of the previous semester or year, give different questions to different students, and give chance to students to present group coursework reports	28
Counselling	Advise students to avoid copying and encourage them to revise, be flexible and encourage students to attend lectures	16
Use of good pedagogical approaches for course delivery	Cover entire course outline you present to your class, do not accumulate all the coursework at the same time and towards the end of the semester, cooperate with students to report copying, and be compassionate to weak students	20
Graduate research projects supervision	Supervisor should meet supervisees on a specified times during the week to monitor students' research progress. A student leader should be appointed for research coordination purpose	2
Punishment for copying coursework	Be strict in marking and award no marks for copied work, expose students who copy coursework and punish them. Punish the one who copies and the one who gives finished assignment for copying, implement the policies that spell punishment for copying, and agree with students on the punishment for copying	21
Realistic schedule for coursework research	Give your students enough time to research on coursework questions, and coursework submission time should be clear to the students. This should include the mode of collection, submission place and time	12
Directives for answering coursework questions	Guide students on question approach, give references and handouts make corrections to coursework, use clear and simple language for questions in coursework and stock library with the books needed for the courses offered in the university	27
Plagiarism detection	Spend some time to detect copied work, each student should sign one's coursework report before submission of the work	12
Extra coursework	Students who miss coursework for genuine reasons (e.g. sickness and bereavement) should be given another coursework	4

4.1 Framework for University coursework administration

I formulate this framework to guide course facilitators in universities in coursework administration. Most of the points in the framework call the attention of course facilitators to address them. There are few exceptions such as resources provision in libraries and competence building in pedagogy that should be addressed by the university management. Figure 1 is the

diagrammatic representation of the 9-points framework for university coursework administration.

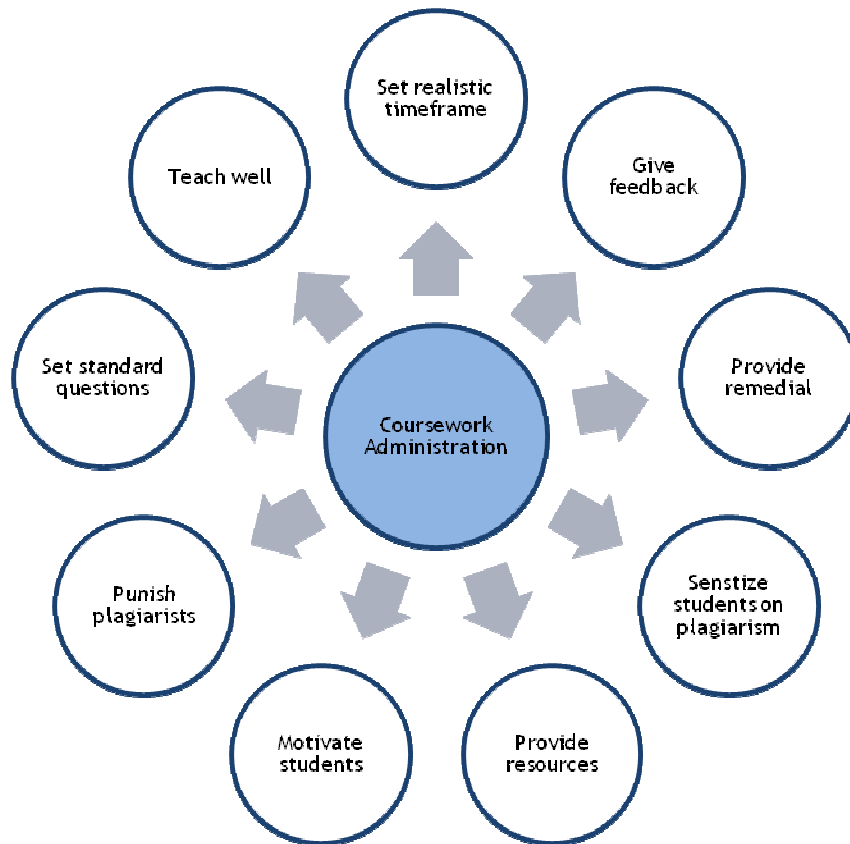


Figure 1: Framework for Administration of University Coursework

Each of the components of the above framework is explained in the next section below:

1. Set standard questions—the questions in the coursework should be appropriate to challenge the students' intellectual curiosity. Set questions students can understand and answer. Do not repeat questions you gave to your class of the previous semester.
2. Improve on quality of course delivery—give good foundation of the course in the first few lectures. With good background in the course the students can do effective research in coursework to explore more concepts and acquire additional knowledge. Encourage students to attend lectures. The institution should have policy on class attendance. For example, a student may be expected to attend at least 70% of the lectures before registering for

the final examination in the course. The course facilitators should use variety of teaching methods when conducting lectures. Examples of teaching methods include direct lectures using PowerPoint presentations, simulations, and group work and report presentations. Students learn differently, so the use of different teaching approaches enriches content delivery to students.

3. Sensitize students on plagiarism—the course facilitators should not only concentrate on the technical aspect of the course that is limited to the coverage of the course content, they should also counsel their students on moral issues regarding the course. The ethical and moral aspects of the course should highlight honesty in examination and coursework, punishments for cheating students, observation of the coursework submission deadlines, and no tolerance for plagiarism.
4. Set clear and realistic coursework timeframe – course facilitators should give sufficient time for students to do research and write course report for submission. The time for submission should be indicated on the coursework document. The mode of collecting completed coursework should be clearly stated. Example, online submission, submission at course facilitator's office or lecture room with defined time frame for collection.
5. Provide coursework feedback to students—the course facilitators should provide feedback or coursework results to students so that each student gets to know how he or she has performed in the coursework. The feedback may include steps of approaching different questions and hence the solutions to different types of questions.
6. Provide continuous assessments for improvements—the course facilitators are encouraged to provide extra coursework to students who either missed the timetabled coursework for genuine reasons or performed weakly in the coursework and want to do the next one with aim of improving on the previous one. Genuine reasons for missing coursework may include sickness in which case the student is admitted in a health clinic or hospital.
7. Provide resources for research—the institution or faculty should provide relevant textbooks for students to access from libraries. Alternatively, a faculty or university department should make subscription to an online library so that students access modern textbooks and journal articles for research. If there are no resources for students to use for research we can't expect them to produce quality reports. The students are encouraged to use the Internet for research as long as they know how to evaluate academic articles based on the authors' reputation and the value of the content.
8. Motivate students to do research—sometimes students do not have interest in the course and are not active to do research. In such a situation, the course facilitator should highlight the value of the course and the

importance of research work in career development and knowledge acquisition.

9. Implement rules on plagiarism and exam/ coursework cheating—do justice to the wrongdoers. If a student is caught copying or cheating in examination room the course facilitator should not compromise the punishment in form of bribes or other forms of favours. It adds no value to the integrity of an institution if the rules regarding assessment are developed and circulated to the academic units and they are not implemented for quality assurance in the institution.

5 Summary and Conclusion

Academic integrity in Universities and other higher educational institutions can be compromised by plagiarism, research data fabrication, coursework and exam cheating and poor teaching methods. The University students, academic staff and the general public expect high ethical and moral standards in administration of coursework, examination and research. In the world of competition ethics and morals can be compromised. In my research I discovered that much as students participate in coursework cheating, they are not happy with the practice and they condemn it in strong terms. The students expect course facilitators to direct them with a high degree of honesty in course administration. The students mentioned many factors that promote coursework cheating in Universities. Some of the factors are: laziness, difficult and incomprehensible questions, lack of time, lack of interest in the course, poor teaching methods by some course facilitators, lack of textbooks for research and desire for social life. The students also advised course facilitators to discourage coursework copying by adopting the following practices: giving enough time for coursework research, setting comprehensible questions, counselling students, providing hints for answering questions, and detecting copied work.

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